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Mineral King Plan Includes Railroad

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VISALIA — Officials of Walt Disney Productions today unveiled a modified master plan for development of Mineral King Valley which, they hope, will satisfy every objection raised by opponents.

The major feature now includes an electrically powered, cog-assisted railroad to take visitors into Mineral King from just outside the national park boundary near the Oak Grove area.

They report preliminary engineering studies indicate a two-track, cog-assisted, narrow gauge railway would be highly flexible, allowing the train to traverse the national park along the general path of the existing access road.

The proposed route would pass below Atwell Mill Grove of redwood trees in the park and enter Mineral King at a lower elevation than the proposed road. This would eliminate adverse effects on the redwood trees.

Disney proposes the entire railroad be publicly owned. Any income from

the operation would return only the cost of operation and maintenance, and the principal and interest required to finance its construction.

Because the original Forest Service prospectus stipulated that access must be by automobile, it forced Disney to plan enough facilities to serve the largest number of visitors. The proposal today will allow Disney to scale down the number of facilities, such as restaurants and ski lifts, which will be necessary for ultimate development.

They expect by limiting visitors, attendance will average about 4,000 daily.

They listed the following positive effects:

- Elimination of construction of a new access road across the national park. But it would still be necessary for the state to improve at a lesser standard the existing road between Highway 198 and Oak Grove.

- Drastically reduce the state gasoline tax revenues to provide public

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access saving state taxpayers as much as \$30 million.

— Provide a means of controlling the number of visitors into the area.

— Elimination of a separate high power line across the park with power supply buried beneath the railroad bed.

— Restriction of cars from the entire area.

The officials said the plan presented today is economically practical, aesthetically and environmentally sound.

"It has always been our desire, and it was the desire of Walt Disney himself, to establish at Mineral King, new standards of excellence in the development of recreational facilities on public land, consistent with the protection of the area's natural beauty. This objective can and will be achieved," they said.

During the press conference this morning Douglas R. Leisz, regional forester, said, "We are delighted to support this new concept of a nonpolluting, environmentally compatible access system which can assure access to the ordinary family of skiers at a price within their reach. It will still make the area usable throughout the year in a unique fashion.

Unit Concept

"We recognize that this would restrict the use of the few parcels of private properties intermingled with the national forest land in the valley. Therefore we are fully committed to acquire these lands through purchase or to control them by means of con-

servation easements. The entire Mineral King area must be managed as a unit with everything available to the public."

Leisz said the approved master plan for Mineral King still is sound, but would have to be amended to be in accordance with the concept of sole access by electric railway. "We intend to prepare and file an environmental statement covering the entire project and that procedure will provide for full public involvement," he said.

Sierra Club

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael McCloskey in a telephone interview was asked what kind of compromise would be acceptable to the club. He said "I don't know. We have not contemplated any alternatives and we cannot judge in the abstract. We would have to look at any proposals."

However, McCloskey reiterated the club's position on Mineral King that it belongs inside Sequoia National Park. Mineral King is now in the national forest.

McCloskey said the proposed all-weather highway crossing Sequoia National Park is only "one major stumbling block." He said the club also is interested in what happens in the Mineral King Valley and in the environmental impact of any development.

Limit Sought

"Environmental impact studies must be done before any kind of project is approved and these must determine the limits of development," he said.

He explained that once Mineral King is included in the national park system the club would be willing to consider development.

The US Supreme Court last month ruled the Sierra Club does not have the standing to file suit as an interested bystander. However, the court invited the club to change its complaint to show damages and this case would be heard on the merits of that contention.

McCloskey indicated such an amendment would be filed before May 15.

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tivities very closely from now on and will take legal action any time they engage in any secondary boycott activities."

Cohen labeled the agreement a union victory, saying, "I think in terms of what could have happened, it was a victory to clarify our relationship

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